LING 306 Language, Thought and Mind

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COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is about the relation of language to human cognition. How does human language in general, and any specific language in particular, interact with cognition and human cognitive processing?

Several kinds of answers have been offered for this question, and its more specific variants: How does language relate to thought? Do we think in language? If so, what is such a "language of thought" like, given that we cannot hear it or observe it directly? Is the mind like a computer and language like a computer program? or are there other ways of thinking about language that are better given what we know about the mind?

How does language relate to specific aspects of cognition that have been studied for some time: perception, attention, and memory? Are there ways in which language has similarities to these aspects of cognition? What ways is it different?

How can we use the study of language to find out about the mind? (the question most of interest for cognitive scientists). Conversely, how can we use the study of the mind and/or brain, and all the knowledge we have about it, to shed light on the nature, structure, or origin of human language? (this is a question that many linguists are interested in.)

A crucial aspect of language is meaning - how does linguistic meaning relate to the way the mind works, and the way the brain works? Many approaches to language have focused almost entirely on linguistic form - the phonological, morphological and syntactic forms that can be deduced from the physical aspects of language such as sound or visual perception (in the case of signed languages). In recent years the focus has shifted back to linguistic meaning, after a generation of form-based theories.

In this class we will explore these and other questions and issues, starting from the assumption that any hope of understanding the relation of language and mind has to place **meaning** in the center of investigation.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Understand the basic questions and issues of the Cognitive Linguistic approach to the study of the relation of language and mind
- Explore some of the methodologies used to find out about how the mind works in relation to language
- Be able to integrate ideas from relevant areas of Cognitive Science so that they shed light on the study of the mind through language

- Be able to think creatively and come up with ways to apply the frameworks studied to topics of interest to you
- Practice writing clearly and concisely about the abstract ideas under study, with the aim of improving your writing and thinking

REQUIREMENTS

Reading Responses: short essays posted to Canvas in which you think about the reading and pick out some aspect of it to react to and write about: connections with other ideas outside the reading that you know about (other readings or other knowledge from other classes or elsewhere - referenced). Aim for about 750 words for each response; an essay can be up to 1000 words. 10 Reading Responses required. Graded on a 10 point scale, taking into account making original connections between ideas, understanding of concepts in the reading, and clarity of ideas expressed in writing. - 50% total

1 20-min group presentation on a topic to be agreed with instructor - 20%

1 short paper - not directly on group project topic, but can relate to it in some way (e.g. going in-depth about your part in the group presentation.) Any topic in the area of the relation of language to mind (connecting as appropriate to the topics dealt with in the course. Aim for 5-7 pages (plus references). - 25%

Participation - presence, responding to questions or small analytical problems given in class (including those for overnight thought), uploading Reading Responses to the relevant discussion thread. Any questions for responses thought about outside and brought to class discussion are not generally for handing in, but it is easy to see when they are thought about in advance of class or not, and I will ask randomly sometimes.) - 5%

SEQUENCE OF TOPICS

1. What is Meaning? Traditional answers. Referential Theory of Meaning; Mentalese or the Language of Thought. More recent answer: Meaning is Conceptualization.

2. The Embodied Simulation theory of meaning (also called Embodied Cognition.) The importance of the perceptual faculties in cognitive processing. The grounding of conceptualization in bodily experience. Bergen Chapters 1-5.

Bergen's answer to the question of the relation of linguistic meaning to cognition: Language is not separate from the rest of cognition; it is fundamentally connected to perception, emotion and in fact all bodily experience. MEANING of linguistic items, and meaning of language during online processing of language, consists of conceptualizations that incorporate and integrate many aspects of experience.

3. Conceptual integration. Fauconnier and Turner Chapters 1-5 and an excerpt from Chapter 6. The mechanisms behind blending. Correspondence, Completion, Integration. As with Bergen: Meaning is more general than language. Linguistic meaning is one mode of

conceptualization that integrates information of all kinds, much of it related to sensory experience but by no means limited to it.

4. Metaphor and thought. Abstract thought as embodied via metaphor. Is metaphor just a matter of language? How do we understand metaphor in the light of blending? (Bergen Ch. 9 plus potentially another reading). Fictive motion.

5. Image schemas: Containment, Source-Path-Goal, other schemas. Frames and the mind and brain. Relation of image schemas and metaphor (and blending). Categories: prototypes and basic level categories. The nature of color and linguistic categories of color, showing the constructional nature of perception; how languages are alike and how they are different with respect to color categories. Learning, neural binding. Lakoff video. (1.5 hr)

6. Mathematical ideas and conceptual integration. Ways that basic ideas of quantity and arithmetic relate to human experience cognitive make-up and experience. Ways that more complex mathematical ideas originated via blending. Lakoff and Nuñez, Chapters 1-4.

(According to time available) 7. The relation of individual languages to thought. Neo-whorfian linguistics. Space, Gender, Color. Last 3 chapters from Guy Deutscher's book. This topic can be used as some source material for the paper.

Extra topics: If time in class, or as relevant readings for presentations/papers

8. Implications of blending for the evolution of the human species and of language. Fauconnier and Turner chapter. Mark Turner comes to class March 28.

9. Lexical blending. Creation of new words and new concepts via lexical-conceptual integration.

CORE READINGS AND VIDEO

Bergen, Ben. 2012. *Louder than Words. The New Science of How the Mind Makes Meaning.* New York: Basic Books.

Deutscher, Guy. 2010. *Through the Language Glass. Why the World Looks Different in Other Languages.* New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt.

Fauconnier, Gilles, and Mark Turner. 2002. *The Way We Think. Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities.* New York: Basic Books.

Lakoff, George. 2010 Video on Embodied Cognition.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWYaoAoijdQ

Lakoff, George, and Rafael Nuñez. 2001. *Where Mathematics Comes From. How the Embodied Mind Brings Mathematics into Being.* New York: Basic Books.

Additional Readings and Materials posted on Canvas for class discussion may include:

Papers on blending phenomena in real life; material on infant cognition and language; papers on spatial orientation systems; Life is a Journey and related metaphors; examples of blends, such as Close Moon, political cartoons, etc. See Modules and Pages in Canvas.

Tentative Assignment Schedule

(coming)

RR - Reading Responses

Group Presentations

Presentations will be held in class in the first 2 weeks of April. They are 10 minutes plus up to 5 minutes for questions; 15 minutes total limit. Students should get in groups of 2 or 3.

Student research paper

The short paper (researching a topic or analysis of a phenomenon) is due the last day of finals at 11:50pm. Senior due date is the same but earlier submission would be very welcome.

See the Paper assignment on Canvas for more detail on what the paper entails.